

100 YEARS BAUHAUS

What interest do we take in Modern Movement today?

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Rita Karácsony

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Budapest University of Technology and Economics (BUTE)



Rita Karácsony is an Art historian, graduated in 2014. Her field of research is Hungarian architecture and architectural education during the first half of the 20th century. Her latest research topic focuses on the works and educational backgrounds of architects who emigrated from Hungary due to political reasons after 1956. This has turned her attention to the architectural educational methods applied at the Technical University of Budapest between 1945-1956: a period that was shaped by many ideological and economic changes. She is a PhD student at the Department of History of Architecture and Monument Preservation, BUTE.

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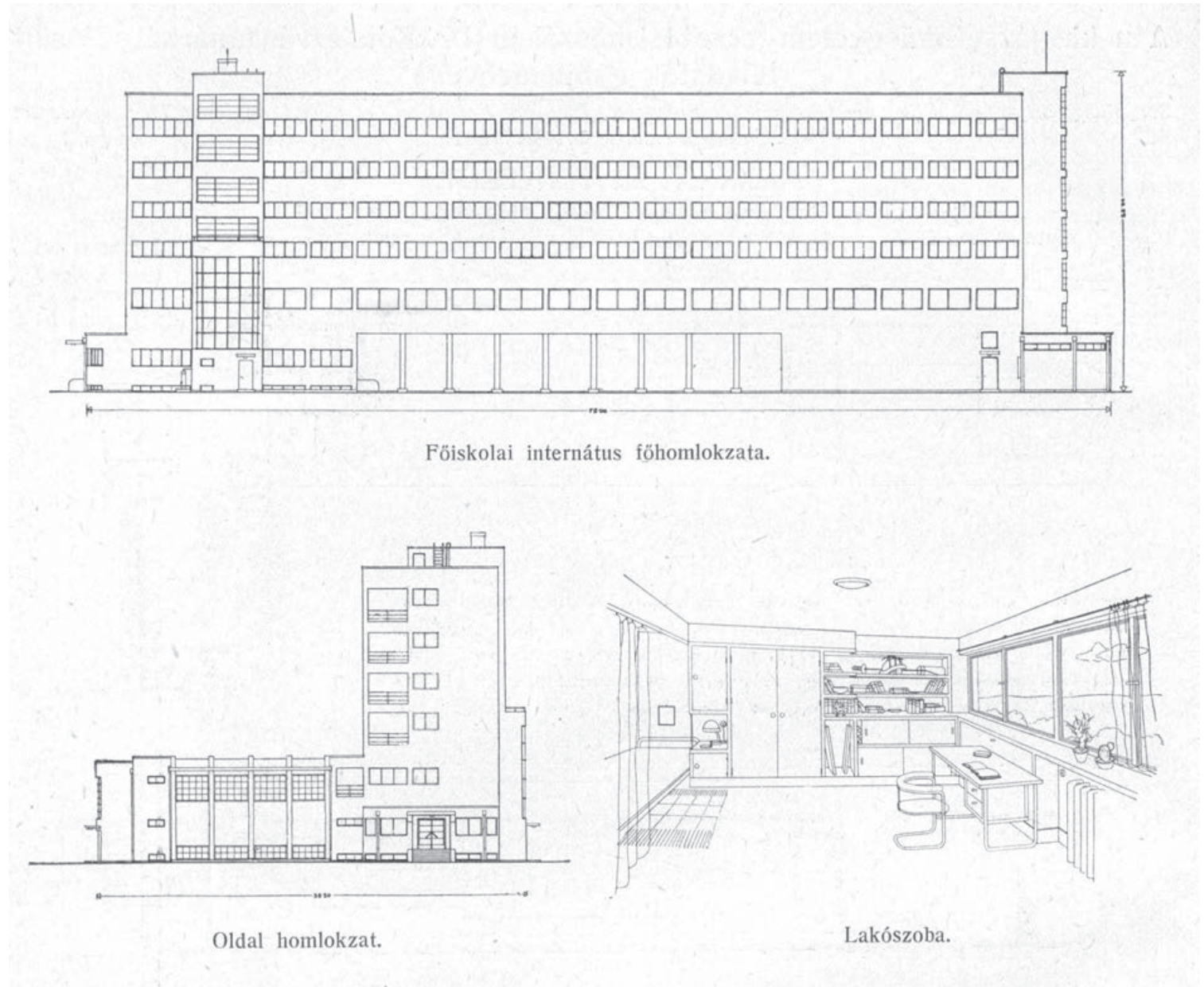


Fig. 1: György Racz, diploma project, professor: Ivan Kotsis, Budapest, 1930.

Teaching Modernism

A Study on Architectural Education in Hungary (1945–60)

Abstract

“One should not wear swimming suits where others wear smoking. Modern architecture needs to be humanised.”¹ These are the words Károly Weichinger used in a consultation at the Architecture Faculty of the Budapest Technical University during the 1940s. The influence of the Modern Movement was felt in Hungary from the '20s onwards² – teaching architecture was challenged to adapt to this situation. How did professors designing in historical styles react to new architectural tendencies? To what extent was the architectural profession or the student community satisfied with the changes? From the '30s onwards the teaching methods were increasingly related to modernism, but after WWII the Soviet occupation had

a significant impact on the alteration process: it was temporarily suspended. The Soviet-type state organisation forced socialist realism as style dictatorship on culture. This paper's aim is to investigate what kind of influence that commitment caused around 1951 on architectural education, which was fundamentally based on modernism that time. Several interviews have been conducted with former students, which can help in answering the question. The recollections point to the fact that the changes that started at the end of the '20s did not stop entirely in the 1951–54 period due to some teachers devoted to modernism.

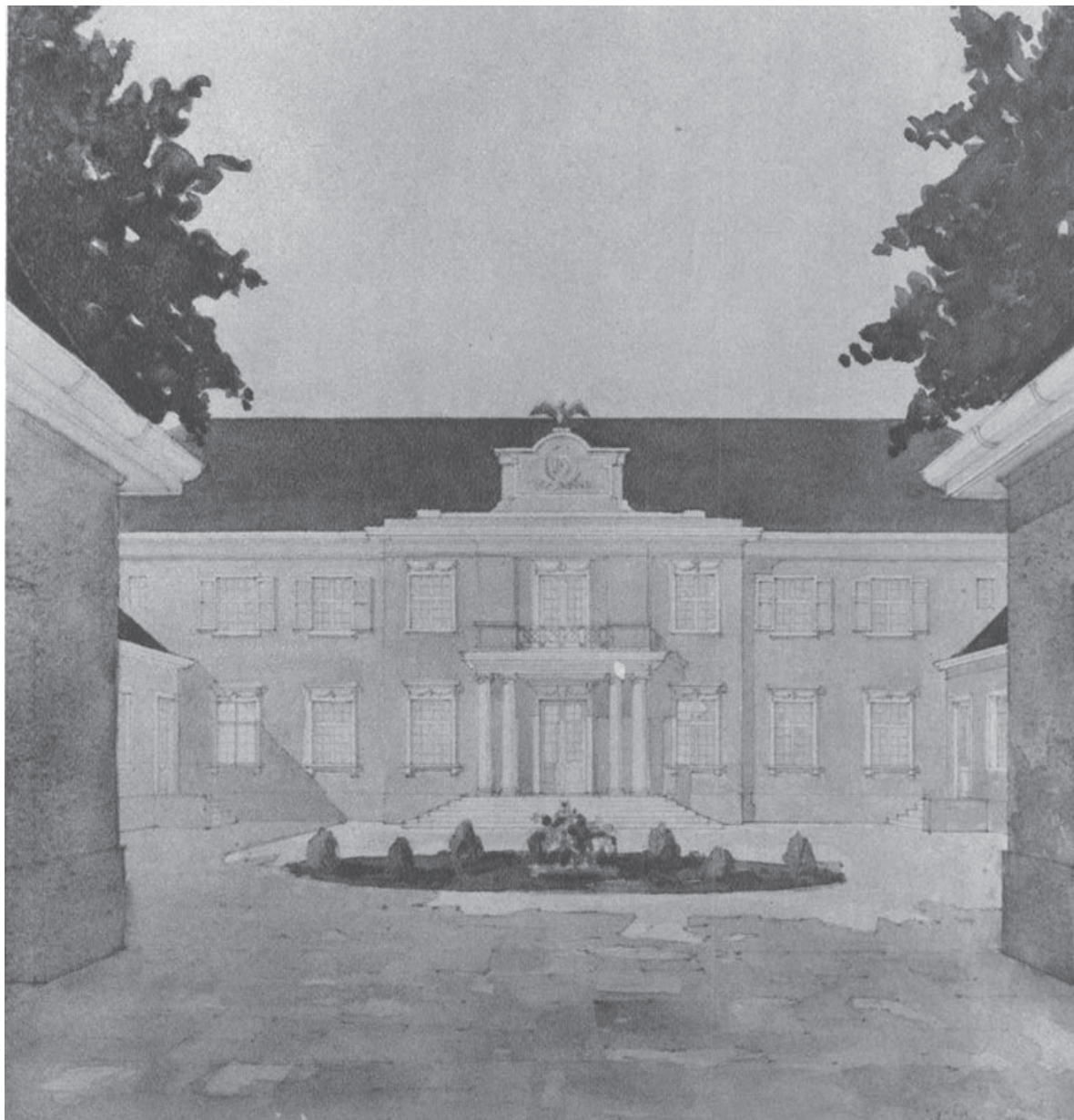


Fig. 2: Karoly David, diploma project, professor: Gyula Walder, Budapest, 1930.

This paper investigates the development of the architectural teaching methods connected to modernism at the Budapest University of Technology (BTU), then the period that interrupted this process: the era of socialist realist style in architecture (1951–54). During this time modernist approaches were marginalised at first sight, giving place to designs in some kind of historical style. By reading the documents from the archives and the former professional press one can feel the overall presence of socialist realism, at the same time the recollections of former students can call this strong influence into question at least at the field of architectural education. Meanwhile, after WWII a lot of significant artefacts were designed at the state-owned offices, then built due to the partly recovering economy. First, we should go back to the end of the '20s: two architectural student exhibitions were organised at BTU, which can show how the judgement of the Modern Movement was modified in Hungary within a few years. Reactions to the student exhibition organised in 1927 well demonstrate the range of diverse attitudes that members of the architect profession held to modernism. Besides drawings submitted as university assignments in historical styles, the exhibition showcased plans independent of any Departments. Such was the work *Villa le Corbusier* by second grade student György Rácz, was inspired by the writing *Towards a New Architecture* by the famous architect.³ Three years later, the plan Rácz submitted as his diploma project once again “reflected a style of seeking new forms”. This design of a student dormitory, as far as the layout and facade were concerned, adopted a functionalist approach, with the furniture of the rooms showing some further influence of modernism⁴ (Fig. 1). Another student, Farkas Molnár⁵, who studied in BAUHAUS before returning to Hungary, submitted several plans in modern spirit to the student exhibition in 1927. While the professional

paper *Tér és Forma* [Space and Form], which was promoting modernism in Hungary, welcomed the creations of the young ones as fresh and up-to-date⁶, the magazine *Technika* [Technics] criticised the curators of the exhibition with strong words: “A few extraneous drawings appear in the corners of the exhibition, which we spare no words for while hoping that the curators will take better care of standards next time”⁷. A mere three years later, in 1930, another student exhibition was put on at BTU based on the concept of one of the teachers, Iván Kotsis. The exhibition was linked to the XII. International Congress of Architects taking place in Hungary at the same time, which focused on the current state of teaching architecture, too⁸. The selected student plans indicate that, due most probably to the pressure from the Hungarian professional audience⁹, modern drawings were in majority, although the design for a building executed in purely historical style was also showcased¹⁰ (Fig. 2). This duality was seen on the designs of the BTU teachers who were working as private practitioners during the mid-war years. For example, Dezső Hüttl, head of the Modern Age Architectural Department and Rector of BTU in 1930–32, executed designs sometimes in Neo Baroque while in other cases modern styles depending on the function, environmental context and representational objectives. Although from the '20s onwards a gradual disengagement with the practice of designing in style took place at BTU¹¹, this tendency, instead of fostering a superficial adoption of the latest trends, was conducive to the birth of buildings with a better fit to local economic and contextual conditions. Professor Kotsis himself referred to this practice as “conservative progression”¹² which contributed to reinforcing and institutionalising the so-called “other modern”. However, during WWII students received education with a predominantly modern approach

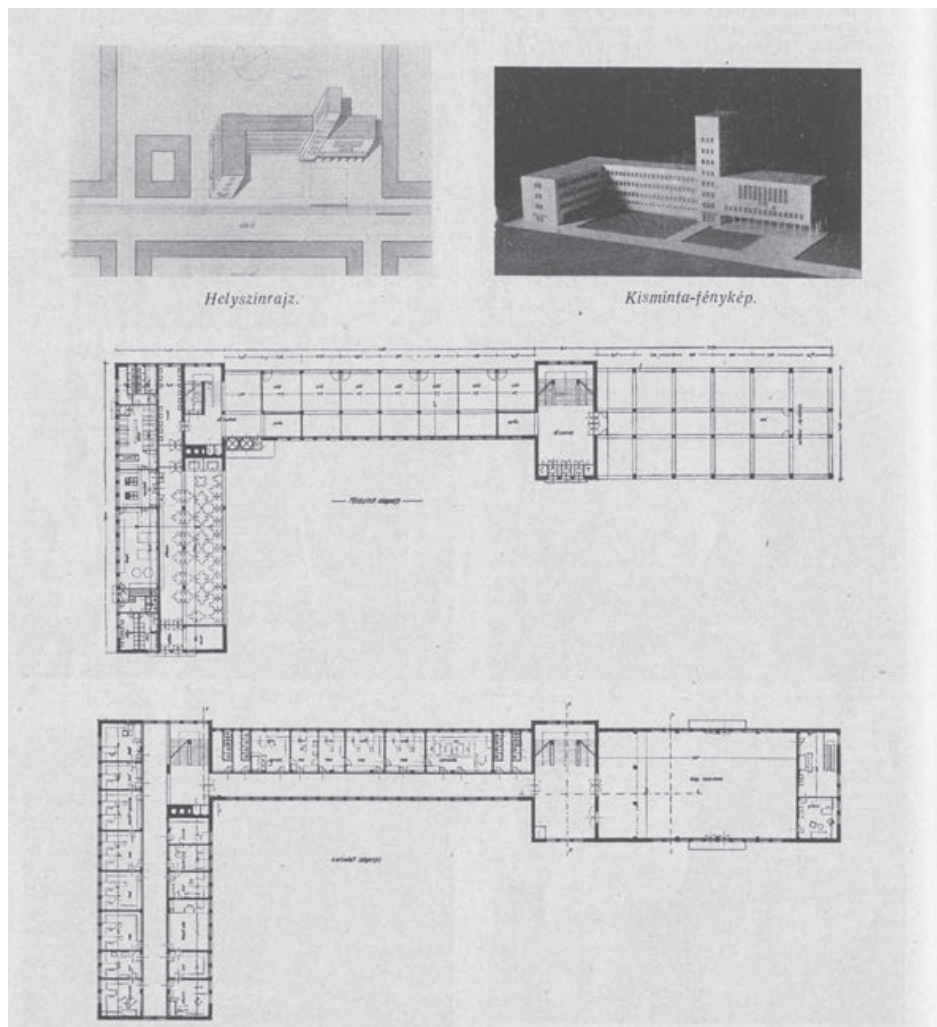


Fig. 3: Arpad Szabo, diploma project, professor: Ivan Kotsis, Budapest, 1939.

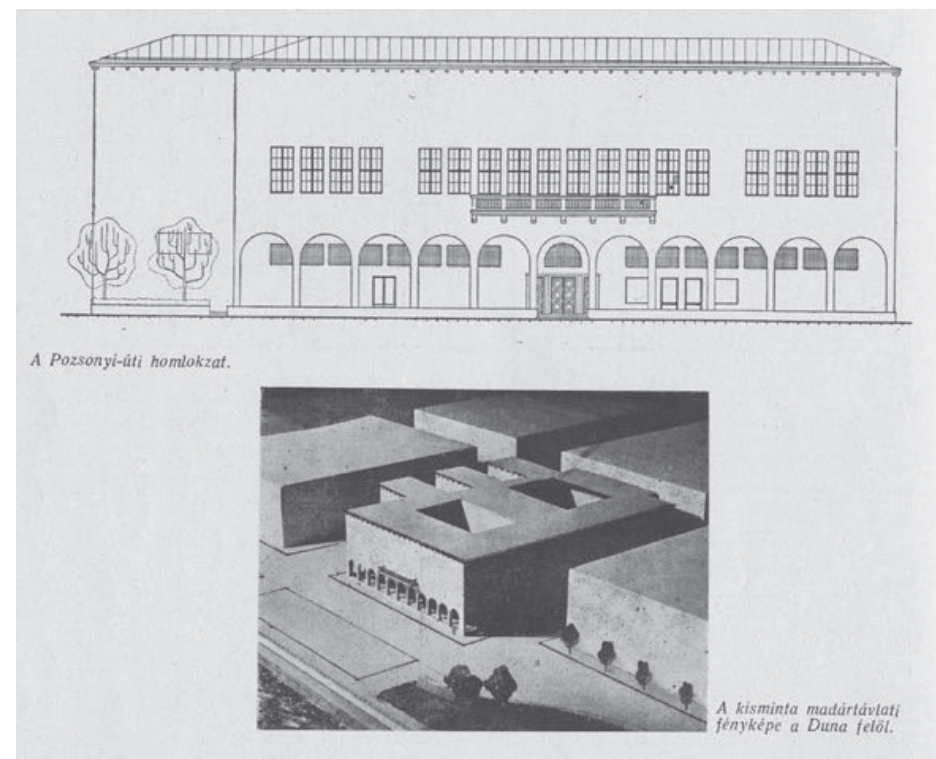


Fig. 4: Ferenc Stechauner, diploma project, professor: Ivan Kotsis, Budapest, 1939.

(Fig. 3–4). This tendency continued and was even further enhanced by the influence of a group of students and teachers returning from Denmark in 1946. “The Danes” were relocated from Hungary in December 1944, by the Nazi-friendly government after concluding an agreement with the German leadership about transporting tangible and intangible assets to Germany¹³. Due to the forward shift of frontlines, the relocation project soon turned into an escape and architecture students and teachers ended up, temporarily or forever, in Nordic countries. Those who returned, brought home many valuable professional publications¹⁴, which they studied with great interest together with their peer students at BTU. After the Soviet occupation in Hungary, just like in all the other countries of the Eastern Block¹⁵, major changes were introduced into the practice of teaching architecture, too. In 1948–49 many teachers were replaced by others who were considered more reliable by the Communist Party¹⁶. Classes with political content were included in the curriculum while later in 1952 the overall educational system was reformed which had an impact on technical classes too. This came as a result of the fact that during the 1951–54 periods, the State adopted dictatorship to culture and made it obligatory to apply the style of socialist realism in the fields of art¹⁷. In connection with this, the Party leadership forbade architects and students to embrace Western “imperialist” approaches. Instead, it was expected that architects once again design more or less in style, evoking the architectural heritage of the Hungarian classicism¹⁸. It was this style that was considered most compatible with socialist realism since classicist buildings originated from an era that coincided with the early years of civic development: an era of progression that could serve as an example to follow. The style was primarily important in the case of public and residential buildings.

Socialist realism had a smaller impact on industrial design; nevertheless there appeared a few cases when prominent industrial buildings were ornamented with archaic facades¹⁹. Teaching industrial design, as well as city planning to some extent, were the two areas that enjoyed perhaps the highest degree of freedom at BTU. In these fields, the style did not make a statement²⁰. But as a result of style dictatorship, a few old classes were reintroduced into the curriculum whereby a new attempt was made to encourage students to use historical forms for practical use. By the end of the ‘40s, architects were forced into state-owned design offices and private practices were forbidden. The impact of collectivisation was immediately felt in the educational system too: previously a department of architecture could also act as a design studio – in other words, the professors could have their own design offices at the university and could offer employment for their colleagues and students. This practice was immediately discontinued. Departments of architecture were soon restructured by functional arrangements adopting the logic of large state-owned design offices. This typically resulted in the creation of four design departments each specialising in a specific design function. From these departments of public, residential, industrial and agricultural buildings as well as city planning, the students could follow a straight road to large government-owned corporations²¹. In comparison with architects employed at state design offices, students of architecture were in an easier position, because there weren’t as many expectations towards them in connection with socialist realism. Style dictatorship did not disrupt their professional development as much. This conclusion is supported by interviews conducted during the 2016–18 periods with the architects who were students at that time²². Several interviewees pointed out that they considered socialist

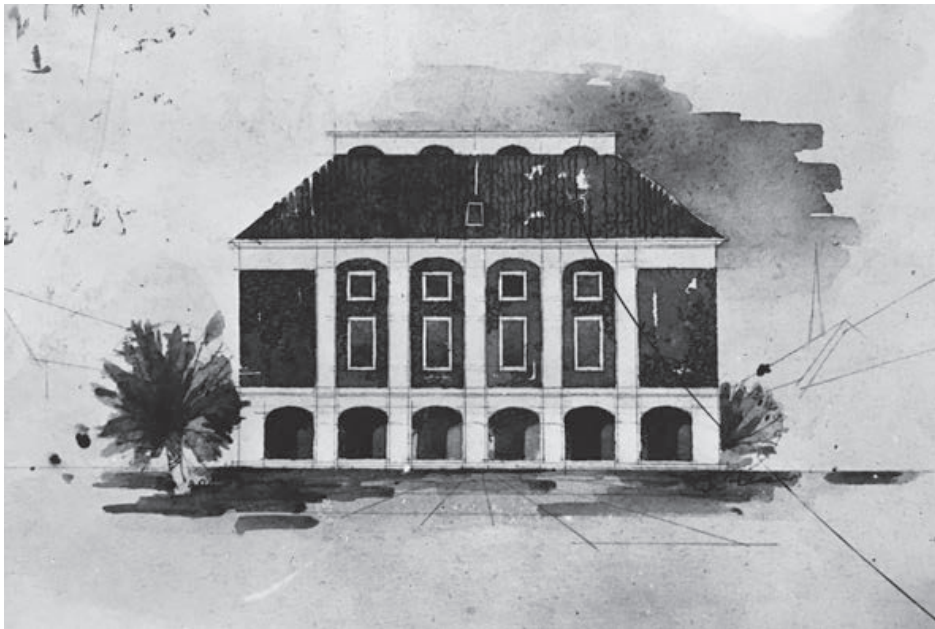


Fig. 5: Zoltan Kery, student work, professor: Karoly Weichinger, Budapest, 1954.



Fig. 6: Dezső Ercsi, diploma project, professor: Karoly Weichinger, Budapest, 1954.

realism as an “add on” activity. Accordingly, they fundamentally designed functional buildings and met style expectations by adding some ornamental features to the facade. During the era of socialist realism (1951–54), for a few years, this method of composition was thought in independent classes (Fig. 5–6). Special permissions were given to the talented students by their teachers to submit two parallel designs. The first one was the original one, which met the requirements of the style dictated by the Communist Government and the second one was the secret one reflecting the modern approaches²³. In case of assignments for lower grade students, vernacular architecture also offered a starting point; students enjoyed tapping into this source²⁴. Furthermore, Scandinavian classical modern architecture could also be used within the framework of the socialist realist style (Fig. 7.). The usability of Scandinavian architecture was proved by buildings designed in state-owned planning offices, too. For example, BTU's new complex, the execution of which could be observed by the student community too (1950–54), was built in such style. Thanks to some teachers – who remained dedicated to modernism during the era of socialist realism – continuity with the previous period could also be maintained. Professor Károly Weichinger gave secret lectures in closed private groups, with the use of professional publications, which evoked an interest in his audience for the latest trends in Western architecture²⁵. Around 1955–56, due to arrangements made by Professors Alajos Sódor and Frigyes Pogány, a few students had the opportunity to visit studios where they were introduced to “non-official” painting. The professors took advantage of these situations to offer an overview of modern, foreign religious architecture, by the use of architectural journals or books²⁶. Such activities involved major risks even during the era of political relief around

1956, since at that time it was forbidden to build any religious buildings and such architecture was not accepted as the subject of design tasks in the education system either. These secret lectures were only accessible to a small audience. However, Professor Pogány's official lectures on art history at BTU were popular beyond measure; even students from other universities attended his classes so that they could “do some travelling abroad (in their mind)”²⁷, which was otherwise not allowed for a long time after the Iron Curtain had been installed from 1949. Due to changes upon the death of Stalin, style dictatorship was abolished, too. After Khrushchev's speech in 1954, the practice of modern design could be continued where it was stopped before 1951. Unfortunately, for many students of architecture, there remained little room to explore the new approaches of Socialist architecture beyond 1956, since they were forced to leave their home country once the 1956 Revolution was defeated²⁸. However compared to their peers in Hungary, they could join the latest trends, such as structuralism and new brutalism, somewhat earlier. 1956 gave a temporary pause to the development of Hungarian architecture, but opportunities for progressive architectural thought once again opened up later on. Instead of giving an archaic character to socialist realism, modern Socialist architecture was defined as one that relies on technical innovations, prefabrication and standardization. By this, a new era dawned on Hungarian architecture²⁹.

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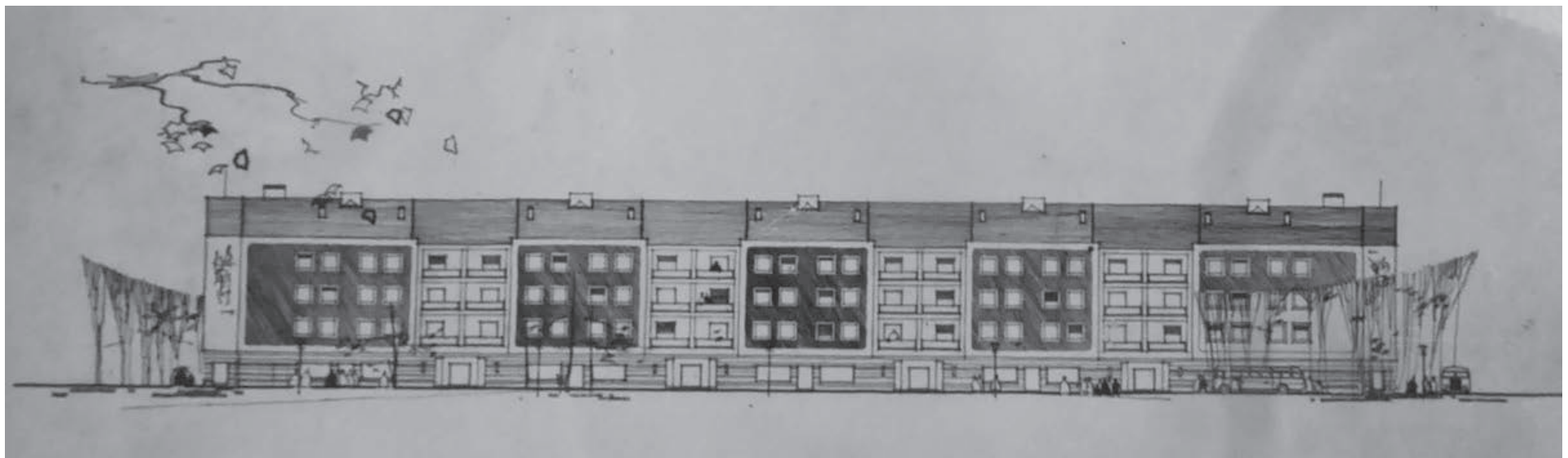


Fig. 7: Zoltan Kery, diploma project, professor: Karoly Weichinger, Budapest, 1955.

Ibolya Cs. Plank – Virág Hajdú – Pál Ritoók: *Fény és forma/Light and Form, Modern építészet és fotó/Modern Architecture and Photography 1927–50*, Budapest, KÖH, 2003.

Aleš Gabrič: "Europe at the time of totalitarian regimes", Zupančič – Ifko – Fikfak – Juvančič – Verovšek: *Manual of Wise Management, Preservation, Reuse and Economic Valorisation of Architecture of Totalitarian Regimes of the 20th Century*, Forlì and Ljubljana, 2013

Mariann Simon: "Progressive, Forward-looking and Advanced. Hungarian Architecture and Modernity 1956–62", Bratislava, *Architektúra & urbanizmus*. 47. (2013) 2. 20–33.

Adolph Stiller (ed.): *Ungarn – Bauten der Aufbruchszeit 1945–60 / Hungary – Architecture in the era of awakening*, Wien, Mury Salzmann, 2014.

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Notes

[1] Hadik András (szerk.): Weichinger Károly / Rimanóczy Gyula, Budapest, OMvH Magyar Építészeti Múzeum, 1994. 42.

[2] András Ferkai: "Die Entwicklung der Ungarischen Architektur zwischen 1910 und 1965", Michael Kraus – Dieter Rausch – Carolin Schönemann (red.): *Baustelle: Ungarn – Neue Ungarische Architektur*, Berlin, Akademie der Künste, 1999. 6–10.

[3] Later on György Rácz became a CIAM member, and played a significant role at the CIRPAC group established by Hungarian architects. Rácz Mária, Rácz György építész (1907–1988) emlékkiállítása, Budapest, HAP Galéria, 2006. 3.

[4] This solution is similar to the furniture of Villa Delej planned by Farkas Molnár in 1929. Ibolya Cs. Plank – Virág Hajdú – Pál Ritoók: *Fény és forma/Light and Form, Modern építészet és fotó/Modern Architecture and Photography 1927–50*, Budapest, KÖH, 2003. 103.

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21.11.2018, <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/670981?journalCode=wes&#/doi/abs/10.1086/670981?journalCode=wes>

[6] "Néhány terv az építészkiállításról", Budapest, *Tér és Forma*, a Vállalkozók Lapja melléklete, 48. (1927) 5. sz. 6–7.

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[9] In his article "On the Calling of Teachers of Architecture", Komor Marcell urges changes in the system of architectural education, at the same time he acknowledges the first taken steps by Professors Hüttl and Kotsis towards modern architecture. *Tér és Forma*. 2. (1929) 3. sz. 92–98.

[10] "A Budapesti M. Kir. József Műegyetem építészhallgatóinak kiállítása 1930", Budapest, *Technika*, 11. (1930) 7. sz. 1–5. + mellékletek. Abstract in English. ["The exhibition of the students at the Technical University of Budapest"]

[11] Kotsis Iván: *Életrajzom*, Budapest, HAP Galéria – Magyar Építészeti Múzeum, 2010. 173.

[12] Kotsis Iván: "Építésznevelés a Műegyetemen", Budapest, *Tér és Forma*, 3. (1930) 3. sz. 195.

[13] Palasik Mária: *A műegyetemisták Odüsszeiája 1944–46*, Budapest, Műegyetemi Kiadó, 2006. 13.

[14] The following book was brought by "The Danes" to the Design Department II. at the Technical University in 1946. Brunnberg, Hans – Neumüller, Hans-Fredrik: *Trethio-talets byggnadskonst i Sverige*, Stockholm, Rabén och Sjörger, 1943

[15] Aleš Gabrič: "Europe at the time of totalitarian regimes", Zupančič – Ifko – Fikfak – Juvančič – Verovšek: *Manual of Wise Management, Preservation, Reuse and*



Fig. 8:

Economic Valorisation of Architecture of Totalitarian Regimes of the 20th Century, Forli and Ljubljana, 2013. 17.

[16] Istvánfi Gyula: "Adatok a magyar építészképzés műegyetemi történetéhez 1945–1990. Rendszerváltástól rendszerváltásig", Budapest, *Építés – Építészettudomány*, 43. (2015) 1–2. sz. 5.

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[20] *The memoir of János Rákos*, 2017.

[21] Ferkai András – Rubóczky Erzsébet: *KÖZTI 66, egy tervezőiroda története I–II. / KÖZTI 66 The History of an Architecture Company II. (1992–2015)*, Budapest, Vince, 2015.

[22] The co-author of this paper, Rita Karácsony has conducted interviews with 25 former students over the past two years.

[23] *The memoir of Miklós Hajnos*, 2018.

[24] *The memoir of Ervin Schömer*, 2018.

[25] *The memoir of Zsuzsanna Kiss*, 2017.

[26] *The memoir of György Czurda*, 2018.

[27] *The memoir of György Sámsondi Kiss*, 2018.

[28] There are more than 150 architects and students of architecture who are known to have been forced to leave Hungary in 1956.

[29] Mariann Simon: "Progressive, Forward-looking and Advanced. Hungarian Architecture and Modernity 1956–62", Bratislava, *Architektúra & urbanizmus*. 47. (2013) 2. 20–33.

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Students' works of the midwar period at BTU

Fig. 1: György Rácz, diploma project, professor: Iván Kotsis, Budapest, 1930.

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Fig. 2: Károly Dávid, diploma project, professor: Gyula Wälder, Budapest, 1930.

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Fig. 3: Árpád Szabó, diploma project, professor: Iván Kotsis, Budapest, 1939.

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Fig. 4: Ferenc Stechauner, diploma project, professor: Iván Kotsis, Budapest, 1939.

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Students' works of the decade after WWII at BTU

Fig. 5: Zoltán Kéry, student work, professor: Károly Weichinger, Budapest, 1954.

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Fig. 6: Dezső Ercsi, diploma project, professor: Károly Weichinger, Budapest, 1954.

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Fig. 7: Zoltán Kéry, diploma project, professor: Károly Weichinger, Budapest, 1955.

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